

bulletin

Virginia Department of Transportation Employee Newsletter

VOLUME 70, No. 4

A Legacy of Service: VDOTer in Profile

Ben Mannell's passion for transportation flows from father's work, finding his niche

Ben Mannell's career highway has taken some sharp turns and some steep grades, all in a relatively short journey. But it has brought him to a destination he longed for from the beginning, a place of service.

Mannell, statewide planning manager in the Transportation and Mobility Planning Division, has taken on responsibility quickly since coming to VDOT six years ago. He fits into it naturally, one reason being his philosophy of public service: "You're out there helping people, and that's why I got into VDOT. I just wanted to help people."

That philosophy runs in the Mannell family, as it has in other families of VDOTers whose kin carried forward a tradition of service through the decades.

"Around the dinner table at night, I loved to hear about the challenges Dad faced...."

Ben's father, Robert Mannell, former assistant state location and design engineer, is remembered for his contributions to the department during 39 years, including his work on major interstate projects. "Around the dinner table at night, I loved to hear about the challenges Dad faced—and the interaction between growth, development and transportation." As far as his future, he says, "I don't think I ever considered private employment—always public. What better way than working for a public agency to make things better for people?" He credits his upbringing for his values of service. "Everything I learned, I picked up pretty much from my parents."

But his decision to become a planning engineer instead of a civil engineer was a bit of a surprise.

As a first-year student in 1993 at the University of Virginia, Mannell took a sudden exit out of engineering school and onto the ramp of the school of planning. "I was sitting in an engineering humanities class, and I was just flying through it. The other students were complaining, 'Why do I have to take this.' I was grumbling about thermo-dynamics, and they were grumbling about technical report writing. I started in civil, but I found my aptitude lay elsewhere." Consequently, planning became his vocational goal. The elder Mannell reassured Ben that leaving civil engineering was fine. "I don't think it mattered a bit to Dad. He was happy I found what I'm happy doing."

Working for VDOT was not part of his life's vision either. He thought he would work at the local government level, and he pursued that goal by working summers or part-time jobs in the Charlottesville planning office and the Gloucester County community development office. He also worked for VDOT one summer during college as a construction inspector trainee. Sent out to jobs on Richmond thoroughfares, Robious Road and Hull Street, he saw the construction side of things.

"They gave me a truck, hard hat, and vest, and the next thing I knew..."

"They gave me a truck, hard hat, and vest, and the next thing I knew I was down in a creek watching them drive pilings, counting the number of hits to each one."

He remembers that summer interlude as "really interesting, really an education." Fielding complaints from property owners and mediating between contractors on a highway project and people affected by it was a profitable experience. He learned a great deal about working with people at the grass-roots level. But the foundation for his philosophy had already been laid years earlier. "Dad always believed in treating people fairly, and he was always aware of not burning your bridges, even when there was a



Photo by Al Covey

Ben Mannell (right) chose a public service career in transportation as did his father (left), retired VDOT veteran Robert Mannell.

disagreement with someone.”

As he was graduating from a master’s program in planning at U.Va., his career orientation toward the local government level was interrupted when he heard about a job in the Transportation Planning Division at VDOT. He applied for it and got it.

Mannell’s first assignment was as a planning engineer for the Danville and Martinsville areas, “a great place to start,” he says. “There was time to learn and pick things up—and folks love us down there.” Three years later, as a planner senior, he was assigned to the Fredericksburg and Winchester areas, with “much bigger issues” and where “people were not as happy with VDOT.” Both perspectives helped him, as well as coaching in that period from veteran planners Don Wells, Lewis Parsley and Frank Hancock.

The reorganization of divisions two years ago meant another bend in the road. Mannell was assigned to work with two new MPO’s (metropolitan planning organizations) in Harrisonburg and Winchester. “It was an exciting time to be involved, and to be working with local officials.”

Then, last year, another development: promotion to statewide planning manager. Mannell calls it “a drastic change,” adding, “There are a lot more players—cities, MPOs, and 90 something counties. Your whole scope changes, but you can apply a lot you have learned at the microscopic level to the macro level. It’s an exciting challenge.”

A big reason Mannell enjoys his work are the people working around him.

While acknowledging the meager funding for highway projects at this time, Mannell says his division continues to develop a statewide vision, with an objective means of evaluating transportation needs for 20 years into the future. Working on VTrans 2025, he savors collaboration with different transportation agencies in such a way that they complement each other. “When the technical staffs (of the agencies) come together, it’s like having a forum. It’s really beneficial.”

Mannell enjoys his work in the department, too. A big reason, he says, is the people working around him. “You want to be on a team where people say, ‘I’ll take that challenge.’ And if you give people a challenge here, they face it, and rise to the occasion.” He adds that his colleagues are “trying highly creative and innovative things. They’re giving it their all.”

With that comment, he harkens back to those times of table talk at home: “From the stories I remember from Dad, there are always problems in transportation. But if you work at it, anything can be overcome.” -- by Chuck Armstrong

New systems effect wide changes in VDOT business operations

New management systems, developed in house, have changed the way VDOT is doing business. The systems not only demonstrate the technological capabilities of VDOTers, they also show their determination to get the job done with the most efficient tools they can create. By developing the systems, employees saved substantial costs that would have been paid for consultants to produce them. This article gives you a quick overview of how some of these systems work, how they are being used by employees, and how they contribute to finishing our projects on time and on budget.

The Dashboard

What is it? The Dashboard is a Web-based, one-stop information source for reviewing the progress of transportation construction projects, both those that are ready to go to construction and those already under construction. It presents the status of budgets, schedules, and work orders (project changes that result in additional cost) according to the colors of a traffic signal. Green means the project is on track (on time, within budget and with few work orders or none at all). Yellow means the project is at risk of falling behind schedule, going over budget or having too many work orders. Red means the project is behind schedule, over budget or has too many work orders.



Rick Worssam

What does a user in the field say? Rick Worssam, Richmond District location and design engineer, says:

“The Dashboard has become one of my main project management tools. I also feel that it stresses the importance of maintaining accurate and timely information in our supporting management systems. For projects under construction, the Dashboard provides real-time schedule and cost data to alert managers of field operations of potential cost and time overruns, allowing them the opportunity to develop plans to mitigate these consequences.”



The Dashboard

What’s the Bottom Line? In fiscal year 2001, only 20 percent of VDOT’s construction

projects were finished on time, while 51 percent were within budget. This year the department is aiming to complete 60 percent of its projects on time, a 300 percent improvement over 2001. Another goal is to finish 80 percent of projects within budget. The development of the Dashboard in 2002 by VDOT staff and the implementation of its use in 2003 has been a powerful tool in facilitating employees' goal to complete more—and eventually all—projects on time and on the money. While it was designed as a managers' tool, it has been made available on the Internet to anyone interested in the progress of construction projects. This has injected a new transparency and accountability to our business, which helps win Virginia citizens' trust.

The Statewide Planning System (SPS)

What is it? The Statewide Planning System is a transportation-planner-driven data and information source for many daily short- and long-range planning activities. The system's strengths lie in its highly flexible analytical models. For example, it uses inputs such as highway inventory data and traffic data to identify present and future highway system deficiencies based on calculated performance measures. SPS can then systematically identify possible highway solutions for the deficiencies and estimate the costs. The Statewide Planning System was used to develop the Statewide Highway Needs Assessment.

What does a user in the field say? Eric Stringfield, assistant district planner, Hampton Roads District: "As we all know, the department has an abundance of data. The SPS system allows district planning staff to quickly access portions of this data in a very usable form. Analysis of existing roadway segments are available at the click of a button. Some of this information has always been available, scattered about in different databases and spreadsheets, however SPS brings it all together and provides historical traffic data, which is displayed simultaneously, in table and graph form, so that trends and percentages of growth can be identified."



Eric Stringfield



What is the bottom line? The Statewide Planning System is a flexible tool that promotes data sharing, data integrity, consistency and planning accountability. The system gives us the ability to meet federal and state codes in a more efficient manner. SPS addresses

recommendations made in numerous independent studies, including ones made by the auditor of public accounts, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, and VDOT's Transportation Research Council. The SPS also provides objective recommendations, as recommended by the APA, for addressing future highway deficiencies and costs at a statewide level.

Comprehensive Environmental Data and Reporting System (CEDAR)

What is it? CEDAR organizes all environmentally related project documents, images and forms in one place, and offers easy access to them. It tracks all environmental staff work, eliminates duplication of records and enables staff to have more time for environmental analysis. The system also documents environmental decisions, streamlines interagency actions, and communicates environmental commitments made by the department.

What does a user in the field say? Brenda Willis, environmental planner, Salem District: "Once fully implemented, CEDAR will provide a true cradle-to-grave-history of a project with a few clicks of a mouse. There will be no more having to send multiple copies of documents. If someone misplaces their copy, they can go in and get another. And there will be no more waiting for information through 'snail mail.' A few clicks on one end and few clicks on the other and the information is there."



Brenda Willis

What's the bottom line? CEDAR is the most significant change in how VDOT conducts environmental business in the last 15 years. It supports projects from inception to construction and beyond. It brings uniformity to the way data is collected, reduces entry errors, and gives staff instant access to details in that data. Further, the new system allows all VDOT programs access to current environmental information in a way not previously available. The outcome is that CEDAR reduces the time to advance transportation projects and provides accountability for the progress made on them.



Right of Way and Utilities Management System (RUMS)

What is it? RUMS was developed in cooperation with McLean-based BearingPoint Inc. to track the “acquisition process.” This includes land appraising, price negotiation, and relocation of displaced families and businesses. It also includes legal processes needed to acquire properties, relocate utilities affected by highway construction, and maintain and dispose of properties no longer needed for transportation programs. With RUMS, right of way managers can quickly see the status of highway projects, along with key deadlines for right of way and utilities transactions. When necessary, managers can use the system to reassign agents to meet these deadlines.

What does a user in the field say? Kathryn Horne, project management technician, Richmond District: “RUMS is an innovative tool which streamlines our efforts for creating, storing and retrieving data used to acquire rights of way or dispose of surplus property. The easy access to project information allows us to assess and monitor our workload and workforce resources. I find it is a constructive system for our program management team’s use in reaching our on-time, on-budget goals.”



Kathryn Horne

What’s the Bottom Line? RUMS has made it easier for the Right of Way and Utilities Division staff to identify projects in danger of missing projected advertisement dates. Currently it is deployed in a Web environment through the VDOT IntraNet (iRUMS). However, plans are to make the system Internet accessible during the next year. The state of Minnesota recently purchased a license of the RUMS Source Code from VDOT and is using it to develop a system of its own. Maine’s DOT has entered into a license agreement with VDOT to do the same.

Cost Estimating System

What is it? The Project Cost Estimating System provides a comprehensive approach to gathering data on every foreseeable requirement of a proposed transportation construction project and combining those requirements with inflation-adjusted costs. These requirements include land acquisitions, utilities repositioning, preliminary engineering, site preparation, and construction. They also can include environmental mitigations (such as hazmat removals), landscaping, lighting, retaining walls, turn lanes, traffic signals, additional lighting, cultural site preservations, and other needs. The review of all such needs is called “scoping,” a process made intensely thorough within the cost estimating system.

What does a user in the field say? Tim Hartzell, assistant location and design engineer, Northern Virginia District, says: “The Project Cost Estimating System (PCES) has brought much-needed order and consistency to the process of estimating our projects, particularly in the early stages of project development, where the stage is set for project success or failure. PCES cost estimates are based on actual completed costs for similar projects, which include work orders and other unforeseen costs. One of the biggest challenges is sorting and categorizing completed project cost data in ways that enable PCES to match it up with proposed or ongoing projects. Properly managed and maintained, the cost database – and our estimates – will continue to improve with time. The PCES Project Development Web site also provides quick access to project schedule, budget, and funding data and other project documents such as current drawings.”



What’s the Bottom Line? The cost-estimating system will reduce disparities in what VDOT engineers estimate transportation projects will cost and what they actually do cost when complete. The system provides an expansive checklist of items to consider in the estimating process. This changes the pattern of the past when important items were not anticipated and project costs were often underestimated. With the cost estimating system, VDOT commits to providing estimates on all projects, statewide, that when averaged come within five percent of final costs.

News Briefs



Commissioner Shucet with Roy Alexander

Hero Awards won by two employees--Phillip Davis and Roy Alexander, Hampton Roads District, were presented VDOT Hero Awards by Commissioner Philip Shucet in ceremonies June 25.

Davis, a bridge-tunnel patrol supervisor, was responding to an incident along I-64 in June when he spotted a vehicle on fire near 4th View Street in Norfolk. He rushed to the scene to find a confused gentleman who had crashed into a bush but still had his foot on the gas pedal. With help from two other individuals, Davis was able to break the rear passenger window of the vehicle and pull the gentleman to safety, saving his life.

Alexander, an engineer technician who has been with VDOT for more than 20 years, was eating his lunch when he watched a nearby minivan erupt in flames this January. He noticed the occupants were distracted and unaware of the growing flames. Acting quickly, he rushed to the vehicle and helped a woman and her two small children escape to safety.



Commissioner Shucet with Phillip Davis

“We are proud to have such outstanding individuals as members of our team,” said Commissioner Shucet. “Their selfless acts of true bravery serve as examples of the type of citizens we should all strive to become.” Each man will receive a signed letter and a medal from the Commissioner, and their names will be inscribed on a plaque dedicated to VDOT workers who have performed similar acts of bravery.

Givens named Bristol administrator--James S. Givens, who became Bristol District administrator on a temporary assignment last year, will remain in that position. In making the announcement, VDOT Commissioner Philip Shucet said, “Givens has done a fantastic job managing the Bristol District team, and I am pleased that he will stay on permanently as the district administrator.”

Originally from Lebanon, Givens started his career 39 years ago in the Bristol District. Before his latest assignment, Givens was director of the Local Assistance Division. Before that he was state secondary roads engineer for 10 years.

On-time project delivery improvement continues--Commissioner Shucet notes that of the 145 construction contracts scheduled for completion so far this fiscal year, 24 already have been completed on or before their contract completion dates. Another 105 are on schedule, and four more are one month or less behind schedule. Of the 58 maintenance contracts identified so far, six were completed on time, 45 more are on schedule and two are a month or less behind schedule. This year’s completion targets are 60 percent for construction projects and 70 percent for maintenance projects.

Three cities take responsibility for roads—On July 1, Richmond, Hampton and Virginia Beach became the first cities to take over management of their local road construction programs from VDOT. Legislation passed last year allows cities and towns to assume responsibility for their street networks. VDOT traditionally has managed all aspects of road projects for cities and towns across the state with a few exceptions. VDOT retains responsibility for interstate projects in the three jurisdictions. In order to make a smooth transition, VDOT held a series of workshops on federal and state laws, environmental regulations, design standards and other issues.

Hampton Roads team receives Business Decision Making Award -- Waverly Resident Engineer David Steele and Regina Moore, Hampton Roads District planning engineer, have been awarded the first VDOT Business Decision Making Award. The award recognizes business decisions that result in savings and demonstrate measured risks, innovation, and problem solving techniques. The competition is stiff. Each district submitted what was considered its best entry. From that selection, the case from Steele and Moore was chosen.

Names in the News

Steeg heads Northern Va. operations

Richard (Dick) W. Steeg, P. E., has been named Northern Virginia District’s maintenance and operations administrator. He arrives at VDOT with more than 30 years of experience in the private and public sectors.

Steeg has been director of Mid-Atlantic operations at General Engineering Geophysics and president and chief operating officer of Central Locating Service, LTD/Asplundh. He also has managed energy distribution at the Florida Power Corporation where he had responsibility for effective outage management and emergency operations. He has experience in traffic engineering, transportation planning, civil engineering design, construction and maintenance.

German takes preliminary engineering post

Gary German, P.E., has returned to VDOT from the private sector to take the position of assistant district administrator for preliminary engineering in Hampton Roads. German recently worked for the firms of Michael Baker and L. Robert Kimball and Associates, but he had worked earlier in VDOT's Location and Design Division in Central Office. He moved from that position to Richmond District where he coordinated the preliminary engineering program.

His career as a transportation engineer began in 1971 when he was an assistant project engineer for Blake Construction Company in Washington, D.C. In that job he managed construction of the J. Edgar Hoover Building. Since then, German has served as a consultant design manager for the I-99 Corridor and has managed three engineering design offices in Pennsylvania.

Wright leads Northern Va. administration

Melanie J. Wright has been promoted to assistant district administrator for administration for the Northern Virginia District. She comes to her new position with more than 19 years of increasing responsibility in the field of information technology .

Wright was instrumental in building the Information Technology Section from its inception in the district. She held the position of IT manager throughout her VDOT career, developing the district's hardware from four personal computers and a keypunch machine to 1000 computers and multiple local area networks and wide area connections. She has fostered applications for GIS mapping for snow removal and also for computerized tracking of maintenance requests and land use permit applications. District Administrator Tom Farley praised her "outstanding leadership skills, strong customer service emphasis and her ability to be strategic in key decision making."

Hayes is Richmond District PE manager

Sam Hayes, P.E., has been named preliminary engineering manager for the Richmond District. He moves from the position of assistant director in the Location and Design Division, which he has held for the past three years. In that position he had oversight of engineering services, special designs, location studies, project management and quality assurance.

Earlier, Hayes was Richmond District location and design engineer for nine years, overseeing road design, survey, hydraulics and preliminary engineering. Before joining VDOT he served in the U.S. Air Force, and he now serves as a major in the USAF Reserves. Hayes is president-elect of the Richmond Branch of the American Society of Civil Engineers.

Walus moves to L&D assistant director post

Ken Walus, P.E., has moved from the position of assistant administrator in the Structure and Bridge Division to a position with the same title in the Location and Design Division.

In addition to his service as assistant administrator in the bridge division, Walus had earlier served as consultant services manager with the division from 1999-2003. He began his engineering career in 1986 as a junior structural engineer with American engineers in Richmond, continued as a structural engineer with Greiner Inc. in Richmond, and then became a engineer senior with VDOT from 1994-1997. He returned to the private sector from 1997-1999 to join Moffatt & Nichol Engineers in Richmond before returning to VDOT.

Townsend is assistant bridge engineer

Fred J. Townsend Jr., P.E., is assistant state structure and bridge engineer for safety, inspections and the Bridge Management System in the Structure and Bridge Division. He moves to Central Office from Richmond District where he had been structure and bridge engineer since 1996.

Before joining VDOT, Townsend had 11 years of experience with the Maine DOT and nine years of experience as consulting engineer with Wilbur Smith Associates and Greenman Pedersen Inc. He also was a project engineer for six years with Bath Iron Works Corporation, shipbuilders.

Anderson joins VDOT as assistant HR director

Diane Anderson has joined VDOT as assistant director of the Human Resources Division. She comes to VDOT from the Department of Juvenile Justice in Richmond where she had been human resources manager since 1998.

Earlier, at the Medical College of Virginia Hospitals, she was a senior compensation analyst and before that a consultant with a Richmond management consulting firm. In 1995 and 1996, she was compensation and benefits manager for the Continuous Electron Beam Accelerator Facility in Newport News, now the Thomas Jefferson National Laboratory. She also was compensation and classification manager for the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Abuse Services in Richmond.

Cary leads Salem preliminary engineering

Rob Cary, P.E., has been selected Salem District assistant district engineer for preliminary engineering. Cary began his career with VDOT in Staunton District in 1992 as a transportation engineer working in both hydraulic and roadway design. In 1995, he was promoted to location and design engineer in Salem District where he has been involved in improvements to I-81 and the I-73 location study.

Before his work at VDOT, Cary was a staff engineer and surveyor for William H. Gordon & Associates in Woodbridge. Cary is licensed both as a professional engineer and land surveyor in Virginia and is currently pursuing a master's degree in civil and environmental engineering at Virginia Tech. He also serves on the Technical Committee on Preconstruction Engineering of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials.

Thornton-Crump takes CR post

Alexis Thornton-Crump has been named assistant division administrator for the Civil Rights Division's Internal Programs. In her new role she will be responsible for VDOT programs that pertain to Title VII, equal employment opportunities, internal and external investigations, workplace diversity, and compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Thornton-Crump comes to VDOT from the Virginia Employment Commission where she served as liaison to the Civil Rights Center of the U.S. Department of Labor. She has 20 years of experience in Virginia state government, and she also has worked in the private sector in the equal opportunity field.

All in the Family

Bristol District

District Office: Chris Blevins has been promoted to assistant district bridge engineer. In the Location and Design Section, Richard Buckingham has passed the professional engineer's exam, and Ernie Blankenship has passed the engineer in training (EIT) exam.

Lebanon Residency and Tazewell Residency: David Lamie has been promoted to construction manager for both residencies where he has been acting construction manager since February.

Wise Residency: Tyrone Gardner, Glamorgan AHQ, has been promoted to maintenance superintendent.

Central Office

External and Construction Audit Division: Jerry Hall, manager, passed the required exam and is now a certified fraud examiner (CFE).

Structure and Bridge Division: Structural engineers John W. Wright II and Thai Trinh have passed the professional engineer's license exam.

Culpeper District

Louisa Residency: James R. Baker Jr., transportation operator II, Louisa AHQ, and his wife, Tina, have a new baby boy. Austin James, their first child, was born June 11.

Fredericksburg District

Two Fredericksburg District Location and Design Section employees received prestigious awards for their volunteer efforts with the Rappahannock Area Chapter of the American Red Cross. John Jeter, district drainage engineer, received the Clara Barton Honor Award for Meritorious Volunteer Leadership. Rick Spurlock, district consultant coordinator, received the Rising Star Award for inspiring commitment and dedication to the services of the American Red Cross.

Lynchburg District

Dillwyn Residency: Resident Engineer Alan Leatherwood has passed the licensing exam and is a new professional engineer.

District Office: Norm Walton, assistant to the district construction engineer, also is a new professional engineer.

Hampton Roads District

Suffolk Residency: Joe Lomax has been promoted from project engineer to assistant resident engineer.

Northern Virginia District

District Employee of the Year is Lewis Howard, Interstate Maintenance, I-95/395 Headquarters. Howard, a 29-year VDOT veteran, was praised for his initiative in identifying and remedying problems. While he helps his own unit get ready for snow season, he also assists other units in doing so. He also is one of the first to volunteer when a Tiger Team is activated. Howard was cited as "a hard-working employee who never complains and is always there when you need him."

Right of Way Section: Kasondra Johnston, project administrator, has been awarded a master's degree in transportation by George Mason University's School of Public Policy.

Richmond District

Ashland Residency: Jamison Martin, crew member, Atlee AHQ bridge crew, and his wife, Christina, are the proud parents of a new son, Nathan Tyler.

Petersburg Residency: Steve Fritton, contract administrator, and his wife, Angie, are the proud parents of a new daughter, Sara Elizabeth, born June 1.

Salem District

District Office: Mark Ayles, engineer I, Location and Design Section, has passed the exam for the professional engineer's license. Kim Kristensen, district equipment repair manger, has received a master of arts degree in liberal studies from Hollins University. R. A. ("Bobby") Phlegar, an engineer and an assistant to the district construction engineer, is a father again.

Congratulations to Bobby and his wife, Michele, on the birth of Colin Ryan.

Dublin survey crew: Steve Hollandsworth, survey supervisor, has earned the land surveyor in training (LSIT) designation. Rocky Mount Residency: Don Riddle, transportation operations manager II, bridge-sign crew, spearheaded the "Back from Iraq" homecoming June 20 for the Franklin County and Henry County members of the Army Virginia National Guard's 1173rd Transportation Company. Between 1,000 and 1,500 attended the event at which U.S. Rep. Virgil Goode and state Delegate Allen Dudley spoke. Approximately \$20,000 was raised for the event. Riddle has two sons in this unit.

Staunton District

District Office: Susan Wright has been promoted from policy and planning specialist I to program administration manager II at the district office.

Edinburg Residency: Roger Getz has been promoted from transportation operator II to transportation operations manager I at the Toms Brook AHQ.

Obituaries

RALEIGH E. BOWEN, 85, Equip. Operator A, Chatham, died June 13; retired in 1983 with 21 years of service.

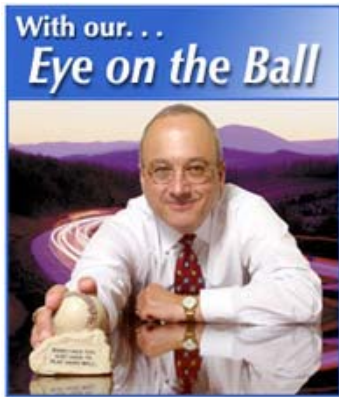
HARRY A. BOYLES, 85, Rest Area Custodian, Edinburg, died May 24; retired in 1981 with 13 years of service.

JESSE H. BROOKS, 74, Fiscal Assistant, Bowling Green, died June 8; retired in 1991 with 29 years of service.

THOMAS H. LAHEY, 39, Engineering Technician III, Amherst, May 15, 6 years of service.

G W. MCMURRAY, 59, Transportation Operator II, Jonesville, April 24, 33 years of service.

PAUL J. THURBER, 47, Trades Technician III, I-664 Tunnel, March 17, 1 year of service.



Commissioner's Column
Thanks, and...

I don't really have a special message for you today. I just want to say thanks. Thanks for your dedication and hard work over the past 12 months.

Because of you, we saw continued improvement in the delivery of our construction and maintenance programs. We set new records for on-time and on- budget performance.

We survived a hurricane and we came through the winter really demonstrating just how good we can be. We gave you a snow budget to manage, and using your common sense and ingenuity, we cleared more snow and spent less money. Just goes to show you what hard-

working people can do when they're given a task, then held accountable for their own performance.

Having the discipline to stay focused over the next 12 months is critical. We're facing our biggest challenge - bringing in 60 percent of our construction projects on time, and 80 percent of our projects on budget. Most of these projects are actually scheduled to be completed before the end of this December, so the next six months are especially critical.

We can't miss. Our future's riding on it.

Stay focused. And stay safe.

Philip

Philip Shucet



Photo by Tommy Saunders

Woody Quinn demonstrates how the Emergency Operations Center's reaction time is reduced by GIS.

GIS application speeds reaction to residents with road incidents

A series of storms across the state can mean a flood of calls to the Transportation Emergency Operations Center (TEOC). Citizens in far-flung communities report washed-out roads, mud slides, trees blocking highways, and bridges under water—often when an emergency vehicle is attempting to get to them or neighbors.

TEOC staff must alert a VDOT unit to the incident as quickly as possible. "The sooner the call gets through, the earlier the transportation network is restored," emphasizes Woody Quinn, the TEOC supervisor.

Fortunately, a new application of the Geographic Information System (GIS) in the TEOC this spring has cut that calling time dramatically—and thereby the field unit's response time.

Emergency coordinators in the TEOC often handle scores of calls, sometimes in the middle of the night when only one of them is on duty. Before the GIS application, a coordinator had to go to a file of paper maps, find the map of the county in which the caller lived, and look on the map for the approximate location of the incident. Next, the staffer looked at the color-coding of that location on the map to determine which area headquarters was in charge.

Now, thanks to GIS, things are different. TEOC staff have computerized versions of county maps included in the GIS. After taking an emergency phone call, they can know with a few computer key strokes which area headquarters to call. It is very similar to how other users access a layer of GIS to obtain information about traffic volumes, pavement materials, and an array of other topics.

There's a collateral benefit, for the TEOC and the residencies. Occasionally in the past there was some question as to which headquarters should do the work when boundaries were not firmly established. Assignments could depend on which side of a road the incident occurred. Other times there were jurisdictional questions with local governments. With the digitizing of the county maps, those lines have been firmed up and assignments have been made clear, another time saver.

"We can get in touch with the right person and get him alerted to deal with the emergency in less than half the time it took in the past," Quinn proudly says.

50 Years Ago

Three residencies get new homes

In the summer of 1954, three new VDOT residency offices were occupied—in Warsaw, Wise, and Wytheville. The residencies are still using them today.



The Warsaw Residency office, located on Route 3 in Warsaw, was built at a cost of \$18,000.



The Wise Residency office, at the intersection of routes 640 and 680 in Wise, was constructed for \$21,000.



The Wytheville Residency office, a mile west of Wytheville on Route 11, cost a handsome sum of \$26,500.

Humor — *It's always close to the centerline (the heart) of VDOT*

Don Askew, deputy commissioner, recalls the story a maintenance superintendent told about a new employee. The superintendent told the employee to go over to "Farmer Brown's road" and "spread gravel."

Later the employee came back, apparently unaware of where state maintenance ended, and proudly reported: “Job’s done, boss. I spread the gravel all the way up to the barn.”

Living Our Values

At Hunting Terrace Apartments near Woodrow Wilson Bridge-- Potential nightmare turned into story of satisfied customers

After ceilings fell in two apartments owned by VDOT, action had to be taken to protect 145 tenants. It wasn’t simple, and it wasn’t easy, but the mission was accomplished, and with surprisingly positive reactions from residents.

The sky had not fallen, but ceilings had in the apartments VDOT rents to residents adjacent to the Woodrow Wilson Bridge project; and it looked like a customer service catastrophe in the making. VDOT had to take action, and did. Unfortunately, the action was alarming before it became reassuring. But there was a happy ending to one of the most unusual and challenging missions in VDOT’s history.

VDOT purchased the Hunting Terrace and Tower apartments in 2001 to provide room for the construction of approaches for the new Woodrow Wilson Bridge carrying I-495 across the Potomac River from Alexandria, and renters occupied approximately 530 of the 645 purchased apartments. The five mid-rise apartment buildings and two high-rise buildings, built in the 1940s and 1950s, had gotten a lot of help from VDOT. About \$1.5 million had been spent on new roofs, security systems, electrical upgrades, lighting, and parking lots and repairs to the swimming pool, notes Bryan O’Sullivan, right of way manager for the bridge project.

Further, while the apartments had become close neighbors of a massive construction project, rental rates were attractive in the D.C. area. In September 2002, VDOT rolled back an increase in rents made in 2001 and froze them until the first quarter of 2005. Rent is \$1,300 to \$1330 for a two-bedroom—with all utilities included.

On March 6, a ceiling fell in the living room of an apartment owned by VDOT.

Heavy construction adjacent to the complex began in May 2003. Some tenants endured the wham of piles being driven within 15 feet of their windows. By the end of the year, VDOT sweetened the apartment deal again by making the month of December rent-free for some residents. Tenants also were allowed to break a lease without penalty if the construction impacts were deemed intolerable.

But the aging apartments and their initial construction methods added their own misfortunes. On March 6, a ceiling fell in the living room of a mid-rise Hunting Terrace apartment occupied by a couple. No one was hurt, and VDOT’s management company immediately evacuated the residents until the ceiling could be repaired. Decades-old plaster ceilings had swollen over time and popped out of their smooth-nail fastenings. While the pile-driving impacts were considered, they measured below vibration level standards appropriate for construction used to build the apartments.

But on Monday, March 8, another ceiling collapsed in another Hunting Terrace apartment, this one unoccupied. Suddenly, the ceiling weakness problem took on the character of an emergency rather than routine maintenance. VDOT and Grady Management, the company managing the apartments for VDOT, composed what O’Sullivan called “a hastily written” memo and on the following Sunday morning slid copies of it under apartment doors. Tenants were told that within a soon-to-come 48-hour period they and their belongings would be moved out so repairs could be made to the ceilings. Tenants were shocked.

“We were very concerned for the safety of the residents,” recalls Bryan O’Sullivan, right of way manager for the Woodrow Wilson Bridge project.

“We were very concerned for the safety of the residents,” O’Sullivan says. “We jumped out of the box and made a mistake, and admitted it.” Consequently, the one-way communication was expanded to two-way, and tenants were invited to a meeting March 23 with Tom Farley, district administrator, Nick Nicholson, Woodrow Wilson Bridge project manager, Jack Rollison, special assistant to the commissioner, O’Sullivan, and others. Farley told the tenants, “We want to hear what you have to say....” They listened, and responded with as many “yes” answers as they could.

Next, Steve Titunik, VDOT communications director for the Springfield Interchange project, was put on 24-hour duty to respond to questions or concerns of the residents. “My role was to be the on-scene VDOT representative and, in effect I became ombudsman for the residents,” Titunik explains. “I wanted them to know that there was someone they could go to with a problem, at any time, and that we could get through this together.” He walked the grounds, talked with tenants, encouraged them to ask questions and got them answers. Also, a Resident Relations Office in the apartment complex was opened and staffed six days a week.

Meanwhile, an engineering firm’s inspection of the ceilings could not determine conclusively that construction on the bridge had caused the ceilings to fall. Nevertheless, VDOT decided to replace, rather than repair, ceilings in the Terrace Apartments. That meant ceilings in

116 terrace apartments, 99 of them occupied by approximately 145 people, would be replaced—and this would be done between April 12 and June 8. The logistics of that were staggering.

“Everything...down to the last fork and spoon” had to be packed.

First, VDOT and Grady Management had to procure an on-the-ball moving company. Everything in each apartment, O’Sullivan notes, “down to the last fork and spoon,” had to be packed by the company. Brand-new containers for the household goods had to be rented and placed in secure, climate-controlled buildings.

Then, lodging was provided at no costs to residents. They were given their choice of three Alexandria area hotels or a furnished apartment in the Hunting Tower Apartments. Also, tenants’ rents were reduced by the number of days they were out of their apartments, and they were given \$51 per day per person and an additional amount for incidentals. They also were reimbursed for wages lost at work while they were moving or supervising the packers.

There were special needs, too. One woman, after attending the tenants’ meeting, was upset and crying. She was afraid for her well being, as well as her apartment mate’s and dog’s, until the ceilings were replaced in her apartment. After the meeting, O’Sullivan showed her several furnished apartments in the high-rise VDOT complex across the street and moved her into one that night—rent free. The management company found her pots and pans and linens, and helped clean out the refrigerator in her own apartment the next morning. A university professor needed numerous boxes of books in his temporary lodging for reference. He was accommodated, as were others asking for assistance with fish tanks, valuable collections, mail and other needs.

A company to repair ceilings was contracted—a company that could really hustle to meet the deadlines. “They almost had to be coming up the stairs with the sheetrock while the movers were going down with the households,” O’Sullivan recalls. Ceilings had to be torn out and replaced; drywall “mud” had to be applied, dried, and reapplied; apartment walls had to be primed and painted; floors had to be polished or refinished; and carpets had to be shampooed.

The time frame was tight. Everything was building toward a climax.

Everything was building toward a climax. Tenants were told that they would be out of their apartments no more than six to eight days for the repairs. They also were told that they would inspect their apartments before returning to them.

After the June 8 deadline, O’Sullivan and the project team realized the massive momentum built up had accomplished its goals. Ninety-five percent of the tenants were well pleased with their apartments at inspection. Further, 98 percent of the apartments were repaired and had their tenants back in residence in six days or less. The operation was also under budget, costing \$925,000 rather than the projected \$1.2 million.

More memorable to O’Sullivan and Titunik than the statistics were the relationships. They had worked closely and continuously with residents, and with the exception of four or five, residents were complimentary of the care VDOT gave them. Leslie Rossi, a middle school teacher, was an example of the customers’ satisfaction.

Rossi’s experience was not “initially positive” after she received the first letter about evacuation. But after the residents’ meeting with VDOT, “all my questions were answered sufficiently....everything was handled well.” The move, she said, was “painless and very professional.” She added, “They did a great job with my stuff.” About her temporary lodging at Executive Suites in Alexandria: “It was wonderful.” And she liked the breakfasts and other services there. Her per diem was processed as soon as she turned it in, she added. “You did a wonderful job of making it right.”

One more reference: Jorge Martinez, a piano teacher, was concerned about his piano, but it was moved, stored, returned and tuned to his satisfaction. “A few things broke and were expeditiously reimbursed,” he said, “but the move went very, very well.”

About the Bulletin

The Bulletin is published bi-monthly, online at **www.Virginiadot.org** for active employees and in print for retirees. Send correspondence to:
Editor, Public Affairs Office, VDOT, 1401 E. Broad St., Richmond, VA 23219
Telephone: (804) 786-4243

Commissioner: Philip A. Shucet

Public Affairs Director: Lynda South

Editor: Charles M. Armstrong

Web Coordination: Cynthia Brown, Greg Brown

Art Director: Liz Liverman

Photo Coordination: Tom Saunders

Video Coordination: Lenny Tierney

Contributing Writer: Sande Snead

PRESORTED
STANDARD
U.S. POSTAGE
RICHMOND, VA
PERMIT NO. 1347

Virginia Department of Transportation
Richmond, VA 23219
Forwarding and Return Postage Guaranteed
ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED